

**VETERANS RURAL HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

September 20-22, 2021  
Zoom virtual meeting  
11 AM – 2:30 PM (EST), each day

**NOTES****Attendees:****Committee Members Present:**

Deanna Lamb, Chair  
Joe Parsetich  
Angeline Bushy  
Marcus Cox  
Vanessa Meade  
Graham Adams  
Keith Mueller  
Katherine Miller  
Michael Mclaughlin  
Lonnie Wangen  
Pavithra Ellison  
Stephanie Birdwell  
Andrew Behrman  
Vanessa Meade

**Ex-Officio Members Present:**

Ben Smith  
Kristi Martinsen  
Kellie Kubena

**Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:**

Thomas Klobucar, DFO  
Judy Bowie, Committee Manager  
Anthony Achampong, Alternate DFO  
Janice Garland, Alternate DFO  
Sheila Robinson  
Samantha Solimeo  
Rich Huang  
Kelsea LeBeau  
Carolyn Turvey  
Phil Welch  
Keith Myers  
Bret Hicken

Sergio Romero  
Travis Lovejoy  
Nancy Dailey  
Byron Bair  
Kelly Lora Lewis  
Clay Ward  
Sarah Ono  
Matt Vincenti  
Karyn Johnstone  
Amy O'Shea  
Vince Watts  
Louise Arnheim  
Carolyn Clancy  
Benjamin Miller  
Kevin Galpin  
Treva Lutes  
LaTonya Small  
Zavian Cooper  
Jeff Moragne  
Peter Kaboli  
Kristin Pettey  
Dan Palmeri  
Ryan Sharpe

**Consultants Present:**

Elizabeth Schwartz  
Jasmine Williams  
Scott Bledsoe  
Robert Derby

**Public Attendees:**

Robin Hutcheson, U.S. Department of Transportation  
Kathryn de Wit, The Pew Charitable Trusts



**Public Attendees (continued):**

Laurel Leverrier, U.S. Department of  
Agriculture

Jesse Jachman, Federal  
Communications Commission  
Abby Roubal

Fred Wagar, Nevada Department of  
Veterans Services

Christopher Fletcher, American Legion

Rene Campos, Military Officers  
Association of America (MOAA)

Theresa Wrzesinski

Andrew Herrin

Anne Davis

Maria Llorente

Gloria Romanelli

Ade Oguntala

Kelsea LeBeau

Mary Sell

Ariana Shahnazi

Chris Benham

**Meeting Objectives**

1. VRHAC will gain increased understanding of transportation and broadband infrastructure challenges impeding rural Veterans' access to health care.
2. VRHAC will gain increased understanding of efforts to enhance transportation and broadband infrastructure to support rural Veterans' access to health care.
3. VRHAC will develop infrastructure-centric recommendations for the VA Secretary.

**Monday, September 20, 2021****Welcome, Introductions and Meeting Overview**

*Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*

- Chair convened meeting, introduced new Committee members, and reviewed agenda.

**Webinar Tools & Instructions**

*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Reviewed Zoom functions, meeting and facilitation protocols.

**2021 Fall Meeting Focus: Office of Rural Health Observations on Transportation Resources and Broadband Infrastructure**

*Thomas Klobucar, Executive Director, Office of Rural Health, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

- Provided background information on rural health care challenges and Office of Rural Health structure and program work.
- Highlighted rural transportation and broadband challenges affecting rural Veterans' access to care.

**Presentation: Department of Veteran Affairs FY2022 Outlook**

*Dr. Carolyn Clancy, Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Discovery, Education, and Affiliate Networks, Veterans Health Administration*

- Provided overview of VA's Fourth Mission and coronavirus response including education and training, testing, vaccine research and distribution, telehealth expansion, and Veteran care.
- Highlighted VA health equity priorities including minority Veteran outreach and workforce recruitment and retention.
- Discussed VA rural health infrastructure and access efforts in the areas of workforce recruitment and retention, telehealth, and community care.

**Presentation: Overview of VHA Veterans' Transportation Programs**

*Ben Williams, Director, Veterans Transportation Program, Veterans Health Administration*

- Provided overview of Veteran Transportation Service funding and service sites. Highlighted program expansion over the past few years.
- Discussed existing challenges with transportation access—highlighted need to modify existing regulations, ensure transportation costs are covered, and establish emergency (ambulance) transport services through VTS.
- Discussed solutions including Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ORH and VTP, expansion of Highly Rural Transportation Grant (HRTG) authority, and collaboration with VA medical centers.

- Discussed Beneficiary Travel program including eligibility, program parameters, and reimbursement.
- Answered questions about collaboration with Disabled American Veterans (DAV), future grant funding and timelines, beneficiary support for dependents, and progress towards VAMC collaboration.

### **Presentation: Overview of National Rural Transportation Initiatives**

*Robin Hutcheson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Safety, Office of Transportation Policy, U.S. Department of Transportation*

- Provided overview of rural transportation infrastructure challenges in areas of safety, infrastructure condition, and usage.
- Highlighted major rural infrastructure challenges—bridge conditions, heavy freight movement, high cost and low reliability.
- Discussed DOT “ROUTES” initiative and rural strategy to improve transportation infrastructure in rural communities to include enhancing livability and mobility, resources for electric vehicle infrastructure in rural communities, and improving safety.
- Answered questions about current grant programs and improving EMS response on rural roadways.

### **Advisory Committee Transition of Outgoing Members**

*Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*

- Recognized three outgoing VRHAC members and thanked them for their contributions.

### **Wrap Up & Close**

*Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*

*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Committee reviewed highlights, concerns and outstanding questions regarding the day’s presentations.

## **Tuesday, September 21, 2021**

### **Welcome, Introductions and Meeting Overview**

*Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*

- Chair reconvened meeting and reviewed agenda.

### **Webinar Tools & Instructions**

*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Reviewed Zoom functions, meeting and facilitation protocols.

**Presentation: VA Telehealth and the Digital Divide**

*Kevin Galpin, Executive Director, Telehealth, Office of Connected Care, Veterans Health Administration*

- Provided overview of VHA Office of Connected Care functions and key programs.
- Discussed three types of VA telehealth, where they occur, and how they're implemented; provided key telehealth impact data.
- Highlighted major challenges and current programs to overcome telehealth access barriers related to the digital divide and clinical resource sharing.
- Answered questions about use of TVs for telehealth, provider training in telehealth adoption, demographic breakdown of telehealth usage, and potential user security concerns.

**Presentation: Public/Private Partnerships to Enhance Rural Broadband**

*Kathryn de Wit, Project Director, Broadband Access Initiative, The Pew Charitable Trusts*

- Provided overview of broadband basics—how it's defined and regulated.
- Discussed the digital divide in areas of policy, expertise/data, funding, financial incentives, and inadequate infrastructure.
- Highlighted rural broadband access challenges related to demographics, narrow margins for return on investment (ROI), availability of funding, competition, and state and local policy.
- Discussed best practices for private/public partnerships; provided examples of successful broadband partnerships.
- Answered questions about potential use of satellite technology for broadband deployment, how to get involved at the community and state level, and how to identify needs of different service populations.

**Presentation: Federal Funding for the Nation's Rural Utilities**

*Laurel Leverrier, Assistant Administrator, Telecommunications Program, Rural Development Rural Utilities Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture*

- Provided overview of different USDA telecommunications programs that support broadband construction and expansion in rural communities.
- Highlighted USDA funding history for broadband, distance learning, and telemedicine projects that serve rural residents.
- Discussed interagency coordination efforts on broadband expansion.
- Discussed recent challenges and solutions to address construction project backlog.
- Answered questions about potential grant opportunities, federal stakeholder coordination, and the American Broadband Initiative (ABI).

**Presentation: Regulatory Issues Affecting Rural Broadband Access**

*Jesse Jachman, Assistant Division Chief, Telecommunications Access Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau, Federal Communications Commission*

- Provided overview of Universal Service Fund—detailed efforts of high-cost program to serve high-cost areas (e.g., rural areas). Discussed COVID-19 and emergency subsidy programs.
- Detailed obligations and enforcement mechanisms that telecommunications companies are bound to when participating in high-cost program.
- Discussed major challenges and how FCC is addressing them in areas of data collection, interagency coordination, increasing demand, balancing program allocations, and affordability.
- Answered questions about Lifeline Program, reimbursement process for telecommunications companies, and how subsidy programs are promoted to the public.

**Wrap Up & Close**

*Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*

*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Committee reviewed highlights, concerns and outstanding questions regarding the day's presentations.

**Wednesday, September 22, 2021****Welcome, Introductions and Meeting Overview**

*Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*

- Chair reconvened meeting and reviewed agenda.
- Played VA Secretary video message to Committee members.

**Webinar Tools & Instructions**

*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Reviewed Zoom functions, meeting and facilitation protocols.

**Introduction to Afternoon Facilitated Discussions**

*Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*

- Provided overview of facilitated discussion process to generate recommendations to VA Secretary.

**Facilitated Discussions: Methodology and Application**

*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Explained brainstorm methodology tools and process for facilitated discussion.

**Facilitated Discussion, Part 1 (“Idea Generation” and “Focus” Tools)**

*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Committee members engaged in rapid idea generation around the topics of broadband and transportation.
- Committee used focus tool to expand upon ideas and generate potential solutions to problems raised.

**Facilitated Discussion, Part 2 (“Harvest” and “Treatment” Tools)**

*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Committee used harvest tool to develop SMART goals around suggested solutions from previous session.
- Committee used treatment tool to identify potential barriers or challenges to goals developed.

**Facilitated Discussion, Part 3 (Qualifying Recommendations)**

*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Committee condensed brainstormed goals into a list of actionable recommendations.
- Committee was briefed on multi-voting process to identify top 2-3 recommendations for the VA Secretary’s consideration. Committee agreed to return voting forms within 10 business days of meeting completion.

**Wrap Up & Close**

- Chair thanked Committee members for their work and adjourned meeting.

**Public Comment Period**

*Anthony Achampong, Alternate Designated Federal Officer, Office of Rural Health*

*Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*

- No public comments.